

Message Text

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46

ACTION NEA-12

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FM AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1598

INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS

UNCLAS THESSALONIKI 0517

E.O.11652:N/A

TAGS: PINS, GR

SUBJECT: THESSALONIKI REACTION TO PRISONER RELEASE

REF: ATHENS 5919

1. SINCE AUGUST 19 ANNOUNCEMENT OF GENERAL AMNESTY FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS, ALL THESSALONIKI PAPERS HAVE GIVEN EXTENSIVE AND FAVORABLE COVERAGE TO PRISONER RELEASE. ATTENTION LARGEMLY FOCUSED ON PANAGOULIS BROTHERS AND, TO LESSER EXTENT, ON LOCAL PERSONALITIES INVOLVED. OF LATTER, RELEASE OF PROMINENT THESSALONIKI LAWYER STELIOS NESTOR, ARRESTED HERE IN MAY 1968 WITH "DEMOKRATIKI AMINA" GROUP HAS RECEIVED SPECIAL COVERAGE.

2. "THESSALONIKI" OF AUGUST 23 CARRIED INTERVIEW BY ATHENS CORRESPONDENT WITH NESTOR AT HOME OF FORMER CO-PRISONER PAVLOS ZANNAS, WHO RELEASED IN JANUARY 1972 FOR HEALTH REASONS. (THESSALONIKI 0028). NESTOR DESCRIBED TERM AS "ACT OF CONSCIENCE" AND STATED THAT GOVERNMENT PRESSURE OF INDIVIDUALS CAN ONLY RESULT IN HARM TO STATE. DISCLAIMING PERSONAL HATRED NESTOR BLAMED GREEK "INSTITUTIONS" RATHER THAN INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITIES. NESTOR PLANNING TO RESUME THESSALONIKI LAW PRACTICE AND PUBLISH LEGAL STUDY BASED ON INSIGHTS FROM PRISON. NO EMPHASIS ON NEED TO EXPLAIN "WHY HE ENTERED PRISON" MAY ALSO INDICATE PLANS FOR PUBLIC ROLE.

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3. GENERAL REACTION HERE OVERWHELMINGLY FAVORABLE TO AMNESTY, AND SOME REGIME CRITICS HAVE EXPRESSED VIEW THAT DETENTION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS AND ALLEGED TORTURE WAS PRIMARY OBJECTION TO REGIME. OTHERS SPECULATE ON ROLE RELEASED PRISONERS MAY NOW PLAY AND BELIEVE THAT AMNESTY HAS ROBBED OPPOSITION OF MAJOR WEAPON.

4. IN SOMEWHAT COMIC SIDELIGHT HERE, 169 COMMON PRISONERS IN THESSALONIKI JAIL INCLUDING DEBTORS, TRAFFIC VIOLATORS ETC. WENT ON HUNGER STRIKE AUGUST 23 FOR EXTENSION OF AMNESTY TO ALL. APPETITES PREVAILED BY DINNER TIME, HOWEVER, WHEN STRIKE WAS SUMMARILY SUSPENDED.

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